



UPCOUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

September 15, 2009

The Honorable Philip Andrews
President
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Re: September 15th County Council Hearings Regarding Draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan.

Dear Mr. Andrews:

On behalf of the Upcounty Citizens Advisory Board, I want to convey our continued support for the transit-oriented development concept that is planned for the Life Sciences Center at Shady Grove (JHU Vision 2030), which has now evolved, along with elements of the Smart Growth Initiative into the Draft Gaithersburg West Master Plan. It is the position of UCAB that the realization of the Gaithersburg West Master Plan concept is an impressive undertaking that will bring jobs, housing, and even more economic development prestige to Montgomery County. We at the UCAB continue to believe that this is the kind of development that will help keep Montgomery County at the forefront of the latest ideas in combining development, land use and transportation. We feel this project will improve our county resources by providing the following:

- Affordable housing for all levels of workers, proximate to good transportation centers, high technology, biotechnology, and medical centers.
- A high concentration of high technology, biotechnology, and medical centers to attract and retain a critical mass of talented people in the Greater Shady Grove Life Sciences Center Area.
- Biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies in close proximity to other life science companies, vendors, and service providers upon whom they depend, and with whom they collaborate.
- Long-term improvement in the county's fiscal outlook by providing an enhanced tax base.
- High paying jobs in the Life Sciences create increased demand for complementary businesses and support services in all areas, which should serve to raise average incomes over the long term and better assure long term economic vitality.

Development of a major employment center in Northern Rockville and the Upcounty will have a long term benefit by affording the opportunity to reduce commute distances, providing thousands of additional jobs closer to the center of the County, rather than relying on most job growth to occur inside the beltway. The Gaithersburg West Master Plan is synergistic with similar efforts such as the Germantown Sector Plan for developing an employment corridor extending the length of the County.


The Gaithersburg West Master plan will provide economic stimulus by creating many jobs in planning, construction and support. This plan affords us the opportunity to practice “green development”. We also believe that it is both opportunistic and excellent asset management to make better use of the Public Service Training Academy property, by including it as a component of this draft Master Plan.

We believe the Gaithersburg West Draft Master Plan to be an excellent concept with the following stipulations:

1. The Corridor Cities Transitway must be part of an expanded mass transit vision for this project and it must pass through the major centers of the life science center to be effective.
2. The concerns among the local citizenry in Gaithersburg, North Potomac, Darnestown, and Germantown about traffic impact, particularly on Maryland Route 28, Sam Eig Highway, Great Seneca Highway, and Muddy Branch Road are addressed. The residents require specific information about the planning and extent of anticipated change, ramp, and rate of construction if this plan is approved, and a better understanding of the impact on their lives especially during construction phases. The local citizenry and the development community need to come to consensus regarding the benefits and disadvantages of the various plan specifics, including building height, barriers and green space.
3. The density of development needs to be closely examined and probably reduced from the current draft levels in the plan. Furthermore the issues of density in the current draft plan need to be addressed in terms of their justification, necessity, and dramatic change upward from the current Master Plan, taking into account changes and opportunities in building technology and greenspace concerns.
4. The Public Service Training Academy property at Great Seneca and Key West should be converted to housing development (including affordable housing) as part of this plan.
5. Effects on water, electricity, and gas supply infrastructure, as well as storm runoff and sewage impacts of the proposed development and surrounding areas must be acknowledged and understood.
6. The staging of infrastructure, and management of the development process itself, especially transportation, must be a part of the Master Plan schema.

In summary, it is the position of the UCAB that the concept proposed in the Gaithersburg West Master Plan is important for the economic vitality of Montgomery County in the 21st century. This project helps Montgomery County justify continual ongoing protection of the Agricultural Reserve while allowing for significant population, jobs, and transportation growth. That said, “the devil is in the details” and the concerns of the local citizens must be addressed.

Sincerely,



Robert C. Thompson
Chairman